

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8031
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2809

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE
SUBJ: PAKRADOUNI ON CABINET CRISIS AND LEBANESE FRONT STRATEGY

1. SUMMARY. PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER KARIM PAKRADOUNI IS GENERALLY DISAPPOINTED WITH REVIVAL OF HOSS CABINET OF EIGHT, REGARDING IT AS DEMONSTRATION OF WEAKNESS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS UNDER PRESSURE. AT CRUCIAL POINT IN DELIBERATIONS, HE SAYS, PIERRE AND AMINE GEMAYEL HAD BEEN UNWILLING TO BREAK WITH CAMILLE CHAMOUN'S STARK OPPOSITION TO ANY REALISTICALLY POSSIBLE POLITICAL CABINET, BUT PRESIDENT SARKIS HAD NOT REALLY TRIED TO WIN THE GEMAYELS' SUPPORT. PAKRADOUNI DOES NOT EXPECT THE NEW-OLD CABINET OF EIGHT TO LAST VERY LONG. DESPITE APPEARANCES OF DIFFERENCES, PIERRE GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN BASICALLY AGREE ON A STRATEGY OF THWARTING SYSTEMATICALLY THE SARKIS REGIME. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF CALLED ON PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER
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KARIM PAKRADOUNI MAY 18, PRIMARILY TO DISCUSS NEW CABINET SITUATION. PAKRADOUNI SAID HE HAD NOT SPOKEN DIRECTLY WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS FOR OVER A WEEK, BUT HIS ANALYSIS OF THE WAY THE PRESIDENT HANDLED THE CABINET CRISIS WAS NOT FLATTERING:

3. HOW THE CRISIS UNFOLDED. PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT THE ORIGINAL OFFER OF RESIGNATION OF THE CABINET (APRIL 19) HAD COME AS A

SURPRISE TO THE LEBANESE FRONT LEADERSHIP. BOTH CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL INITIALLY HAD GUESSED THAT SARKIS ALREADY HAD A PLAN READY FOR A NEW CABINET. ACCORDINGLY, CHAMOUN HAD SAID NOTHING AT ALL ABOUT THE NEW CABINET FOR SEVERAL DAYS, EXPECTING TO BE CONFRONTED WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI. PIERRE GEMAYEL HAD GONE TO THE PRESIDENT AND ASKED ABOUT THE SITUATION, AND HAD ONLY GRADUALLY ASCERTAINED THAT IN FACT THE PRESIDENT HAD NO PLAN AT ALL.

4. CAMILLE CHAMOUN HAD THEN PLAYED A TACTICAL GAME WHICH PAKRADOUNI COMPARED TO SOME OF THE WORKS OF ANOTHER WELL KNOWN SHUF POLITICIAN, KAMAL JUMBLATT: FIRST, THERE HAD BEEN THE PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, WHICH SERVED TO PUT CHAMOUN IN A KING-MAKER ROLE, SINCE IT APPEARED THAT CHAMOUN HAD PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN EFFECTING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. (AT AN EARLIER MEETING, PAKRADOUNI HAD COMMENTED THAT THE DECLARATION WAS SO GENERAL AS TO BE NEARLY WORTHLESS, AND WOULD SOON BE FORGOTTEN ABOUT.) NEXT, CHAMOUN HAD BEGUN ESTABLISHING WHAT HE KNEW WERE IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS. CHAMOUN KNEW VERY WELL THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR SARKIS TO ORGANIZE A POLITICAL CABINET WHICH EXCLUDED BOTH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND SYRIAN FRIENDS. EVEN CHAMOUN'S REFUSAL AT THE OUTSET TO CALL ON PRIME MINISTER HOSS AND TO SEE PRESIDENT SARKIS UNTIL INVITED TO DO SO WAS REMINISCENT OF THE TIME, SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WHEN KAMAL JUMBLATT HAD REFUSED TO GO TO SEE PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE RIYADH SOHL

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EXCEPT AFTER SEEING PRESIDENT FRANGIYAH WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY DEMANDING THAT NO LESS THAN HALF THE CABINET BE FROM THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT. JUST AS THE SENIOR JUMBLATT AT THE TIME HAD PROFILED HIMSELF AS THE LEADER OF ALL OF LEBANON'S MOSLEMS, SO NOW WAS CAMILLE CHAMOUN PROFILING HIMSELF AS LEADER OF ALL OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS.

5. A POLITICAL CABINET WITHOUT ANYBODY FROM THE LEBANESE FRONT, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS OF COURSE EQUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. HAD SARKIS SOUGHT TO ORGANIZE A POLITICAL CABINET INCLUDING THE PHALANGE, BUT NOT THE NLP? PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT SARKIS ON ONLY ONE OCCASION "TIMIDLY" RAISED THIS POSSIBILITY WITH PIERRE GEMAYEL IN SUCH AN INDIRECT WAY THAT THE LATTER WAS ABLE TO PRETEND THAT HE DID NOT REALLY UNDERSTAND THE PROPOSITION. A MORE DIRECT APPROACH WAS MADE BY FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS TO AMINE GEMAYEL; AMINE HAD EXPLICITLY REFUSED TO JOIN A CABINET WITHOUT ANY NLP REPRESENTATION.

6. PAKRADOUNI SAID HE BELIEVED THAT AT THIS POINT PRESIDENT SARKIS SHOULD HAVE SIMPLY ANNOUNCED A NEW CABINET LIST, INCLUDING THE NLP AND THE PHALANGE AS WELL AS THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE "SYRIANS," AND WAIT FOR THREE DAYS TO SEE

HOW THE POLITICAL MILIEU REACTED. AT THE END OF THREE DAYS, HE SHOULD HAVE APPOINTED A CABINET BASED ON THOSE WHO HAD IN FACT ACCEPTED HIS LIST. (PAKRADOUNI DID NOT SAY SO, BUT HE IMPLIED THAT IN SUCH A SITUATION, THE PHALANGE MIGHT WELL HAVE GONE ALONG.)

7. INSTEAD, SARKIS CHOSE TO LET HIMSELF BE CONSTRAINED BY CHAMOUN'S IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS. PAKRADOUNI COMPARED THE PRESIDENT TO A MAN WHOSE BACK IS TO THE WALL WITH THE SEA RISING IN FRONT OF HIM, WHO DECIDES AT THAT MOMENT TO TIE HIS OWN HANDS AND FEET.

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9. WHEN IT HAD BECOME CLEAR THAT THERE WAS NOT GOING TO BE A POLITICAL CABINET, SARKIS HASTILY DECIDED TO REAPPOINT THE HOSS CABINET OF EIGHT VERY QUICKLY, RATHER THAN ALLOW CHAMOUN TIME TO DEVELOP NEW STRATEGEMS WHICH WOULD HAVE MADE THAT IMPOSSIBLE, TOO. THUS, SARKIS MOVED UP THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS DECISION TO "REFLOAT" THE OLD CABINET FROM THE REGULAR WEEKLY CABINET MEETING ON MAY 17 TO MONDAY, MAY 15. THIS PART OF SARKIS' TACTICS, AT LEAST, HAD WORKED.

9. PAKRADOUNI WAS NOT HOPEFUL THAT THE REFLOATED CABINET SITUATION WOULD ENDURE. HE GUESSED IT MIGHT

NOT BE AROUND FOR LONGER THAN A MONTH. ANOTHER MAJOR INCIDENT OF FIGHTING A LA AYN AR-RUMMANEH-SHIAH WOULD SUFFICE TO CREATE A NEW GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS.

10. BASIC LEBANESE FRONT UNITY AT THE TOP. PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT THERE WAS A BASIC UNITY BETWEEN PIERRE CONFIDENTIAL

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GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN WHICH WAS UNSHAKEABLE. CONTRARY TO HIS IMAGE OF HONESTY AND SIMPLICITY, PIERRE GEMAYEL IN FACT IS ALMOST ALWAYS DOUBLE DEALING. GEMAYEL IS ABLE TO SWING BETWEEN CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND PRESIDENT SARKIS WITHOUT ANTAGONIZING EITHER; SIMILARLY, HE GRAVITATES BETWEEN THE PHALANGE AND THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT, AND AMONG THE VARIOUS FACTIONS (INCLUDING THOSE LED BY HIS TWO SONS) WITHIN THE PHALANGE PARTY. GEMAYEL WAS CONTENT TO LET CAMILLE CHAMOUN PLAN THE HARDLINER ROLE, WITHOUT REALLY DISAGREEING WITH IT HIMSELF, JUST AS HE WAS CONTENT TO ALLOW BACHIR GEMAYEL TO BE A BASIC ADVERSARY OF THE REGIME IN THE STREETS.

1. THE BASIC LEBANESE FRONT STRATEGY, ON WHICH BOTH PIERRE GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN WERE IN AGREEMENT, WAS TO TRY TO KEEP AS MANY OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OPEN AS POSSIBLE. THE OPTION OF SUPPORTING SARKIS - OR, IN OTHER TERMS, BUILDING A STRONG LEBANESE STATE - WAS STILL OPEN, AND COULD BE PICKED UP AT ANY TIME. IT WAS TO THEIR ADVANTAGE, HOWEVER, TO KEEP OTHER OPTIONS OPEN AS WELL. FULL SUPPORT OF SARKIS WOULD TEND TO FORECLOSE THESE OTHER OPTIONS. THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE GENERAL MIDDLE EAST SITUATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF UNFORESEEABLE MAJOR EVENTS IN LEBANON MIGHT PROVIDE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES. PAKRADOUNI THOUGHT CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY THIS ROLE INDEFINITELY UNLESS AND UNTIL THEY WERE CONFRONTED WITH A REAL CRISIS, SUCH AS THE IMMINENT COLLAPSE OF THE SARKIS REGIME ALTOGETHER.

12. WHAT WERE THE OTHER OPTIONS? PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT WHAT PIERRE GEMAYEL AND THE PHALANGE REALLY CONFIDENTIAL

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WANTED, VERY SIMPLY, WAS COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE STATE. THE PHALANGE (AND NLP) HAD NO GREAT SEMBLANCE OF INTERNAL DEMOCRACY.

13. THERE WAS ALWAYS THE OPTION OF PARTITION, TOO. IN THIS REGARD, PAKRADOUNI ATTACHED CONSIDERABLE SIGNIFICANCE TO THE RECENT FRANGIYAH-KARAME RECONCILIATION. HE NOTED THAT POLITICAL LEADERS OF BECHARRE, SUCH AS PERE DUWAIHI, ALSO SUPPORTED, IT, WHICH SHOWED IT HAD REAL DEPTH AND WAS NOT JUST A FRANGIYAH PLOY. IF THERE WAS TO BE PARTITION, FRANGIYAH WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, AND COULD EVEN EXTEND HIS PHYSICAL SWAY DOWN THE COAST FACING MT. LEBANON AS FAR AS BYBLOS. WHAT WOULD BE LEFT WAS A RUMP MT. LEBANON STATE. WITHIN IT, AFTER DISPOSING OF THE NLP AS A POLITICAL AND MILITIA FORCE, THE PHALANGE WOULD THEN DISPOSE OF THE ARMENIANS AS WELL. THE END RESULT WOULD BE A VERY SMALL FASCIST STATE, ALTHOUGH PAKRADOUNI THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE LIKE THE ITALY OF MUSSOLINI THAN THE GERMANY OF HITLER, I.E., MORE FANFARE THAN MUSCLE.

14. COMMENT: PAKRADOUNI HAS GROWN INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT SARKIS AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS IN RECENT MONTHS, BUT SEEMED TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS OF DESPIRE AT THIS MEETING. AT ONE POINT, HE SPECULATED THAT PERHAPS THE INDECISIVENESS OF THE PRESIDENT AND OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER WERE MUTUALLY RE-ENFORCING. HE WAS ALSO FAR MORE OPENLY CRITICAL OF HIS PARTY LEADER, PIERRE GEMAYEL, AT LEAST IN CONVERSATIONS WITH US, THAN EVER BEFORE. AT ONE POINT HE SAID THAT PIERRE GEMAYEL GIVES EVERYONE, INCLUDING LEBANON'S MOSLEMS AND EVEN THE AMERICANS, THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS HONORABLE AND UPRIGHT IF ALSO A BIT STUBBORN, BUT IN FACT HE WAS MORE DELIBERATELY DEVIOUS THAN EVEN CAMILLE CHAMOUN.

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